101-433

OLDER WORKERS BENEFIT PROTECTION ACT

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Public Law 101-433
101st Congress

An Act

Oct. 16, 1990
[S. 1511]

To amend the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 to clarify the protections given to older individuals in regard to employee benefit plans, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Older Workers Benefit Protection Act.
Pensions.
Health care.
29 USC 621 note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Older Workers Benefit Protection Act".

TITLE I—OLDER WORKERS BENEFIT PROTECTION

29 USC 621 note.

SEC. 101. FINDING.

The Congress finds that, as a result of the decision of the Supreme Court in Public Employees Retirement System of Ohio v. Betts, 109 S.Ct. 256 (1989), legislative action is necessary to restore the original congressional intent in passing and amending the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 621 et seq.), which was to prohibit discrimination against older workers in all employee benefits except when age-based reductions in employee benefit plans are justified by significant cost considerations.

SEC. 102. DEFINITION.

Section 11 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 630) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(l) The term 'compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment' encompasses all employee benefits, including such benefits provided pursuant to a bona fide employee benefit plan.".

Retirement.

SEC. 103. LAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES.

Section 4 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 623) is amended—

(1) in subsection (f), by striking paragraph (2) and inserting the following new paragraph:

"(2) to take any action otherwise prohibited under subsection (a), (b), (c), or (e) of this section—

"(A) to observe the terms of a bona fide seniority system that is not intended to evade the purposes of this Act, except that no such seniority system shall require or permit the involuntary retirement of any individual specified by section 12(a) because of the age of such individual; or

"(B) to observe the terms of a bona fide employee benefit plan—

"(i) where, for each benefit or benefit package, the actual amount of payment made or cost incurred on behalf of an older worker is no less than that made or incurred on behalf of a younger worker, as permissible under section 1625.10, title 29, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on June 22, 1989); or

"(ii) that is a voluntary early retirement incentive plan consistent with the relevant purpose or purposes of this Act.

Notwithstanding clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (B), no such employee benefit plan or voluntary early retirement incentive plan shall excuse the failure to hire any individual, and no such employee benefit plan shall require or permit the involuntary retirement of any individual specified by section 12(a), because of the age of such individual. An employer, employment agency, or labor organization acting under subparagraph (A), or under clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (B), shall have the burden of proving that such actions are lawful in any civil enforcement proceeding brought under this Act; or";

(2) by redesignating the second subsection (i) as subsection (j); and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subsections:

"(k) A seniority system or employee benefit plan shall comply with this Act regardless of the date of adoption of such system or plan.

"(l) Notwithstanding clause (i) or (ii) of subsection (f)(2)(B)—

"(1) It shall not be a violation of subsection (a), (b), (c), or (e) solely because—

"(A) an employee pension benefit plan (as defined in section 3(2) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (29 U.S.C. 1002(2))) provides for the attainment of a minimum age as a condition of eligibility for normal or early retirement benefits; or

"(B) a defined benefit plan (as defined in section 3(35) of such Act) provides for—

"(i) payments that constitute the subsidized portion of an early retirement benefit; or

"(ii) social security supplements for plan participants that commence before the age and terminate at the age (specified by the plan) when participants are eligible to receive reduced or unreduced old-age insurance benefits under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.), and that do not exceed such old-age insurance benefits.

"(2)(A) It shall not be a violation of subsection (a), (b), (c), or (e) solely because following a contingent event unrelated to age—

"(i) the value of any retiree health benefits received by an individual eligible for an immediate pension; and

"(ii) the value of any additional pension benefits that are made available solely as a result of the contingent event unrelated to age and following which the individual is eligible for not less than an immediate and unreduced pension,

are deducted from severance pay made available as a result of the contingent event unrelated to age.

"(B) For an individual who receives immediate pension benefits that are actuarially reduced under subparagraph (A)(i), the amount of the deduction available pursuant to subparagraph (A)(i) shall be

reduced by the same percentage as the reduction in the pension benefits.

"(C) For purposes of this paragraph, severance pay shall include that portion of supplemental unemployment compensation benefits (as described in section 501(c)(17) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986) that—

"(i) constitutes additional benefits of up to 52 weeks;

"(ii) has the primary purpose and effect of continuing benefits until an individual becomes eligible for an immediate and unreduced pension; and

"(iii) is discontinued once the individual becomes eligible for an immediate and unreduced pension.

"(D) For purposes of this paragraph, the term 'retiree health benefits' means benefits provided pursuant to a group health plan covering retirees, for which (determined as of the contingent event unrelated to age)—

"(i) the package of benefits provided by the employer for the retirees who are below age 65 is at least comparable to benefits provided under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.); and

"(ii) the package of benefits provided by the employer for the retirees who are age 65 and above is at least comparable to that offered under a plan that provides a benefit package with one-fourth the value of benefits provided under title XVIII of such Act.

"(E)(i) If the obligation of the employer to provide retiree health benefits is of limited duration, the value for each individual shall be calculated at a rate of $3,000 per year for benefit years before age 65, and $750 per year for benefit years beginning at age 65 and above.

"(ii) If the obligation of the employer to provide retiree health benefits is of unlimited duration, the value for each individual shall be calculated at a rate of $48,000 for individuals below age 65, and $24,000 for individuals age 65 and above.

"(iii) The values described in clauses (i) and (ii) shall be calculated based on the age of the individual as of the date of the contingent event unrelated to age. The values are effective on the date of enactment of this subsection, and shall be adjusted on an annual basis, with respect to a contingent event that occurs subsequent to the first year after the date of enactment of this subsection, based on the medical component of the Consumer Price Index for all-urban consumers published by the Department of Labor.

"(iv) If an individual is required to pay a premium for retiree health benefits, the value calculated pursuant to this subparagraph shall be reduced by whatever percentage of the overall premium the individual is required to pay.

"(F) If an employer that has implemented a deduction pursuant to subparagraph (A) fails to fulfill the obligation described in subparagraph (E), any aggrieved individual may bring an action for specific performance of the obligation described in subparagraph (E). The relief shall be in addition to any other remedies provided under Federal or State law.

"(3) It shall not be a violation of subsection (a), (b), (c), or (e) solely because an employer provides a bona fide employee benefit plan or plans under which long-term disability benefits received by an individual are reduced by any pension benefits (other than those attributable to employee contributions)—

"(A) paid to the individual that the individual voluntarily elects to receive; or

"(B) for which an individual who has attained the later of age 62 or normal retirement age is eligible.".

SEC. 104. RULES AND REGULATIONS. 29 USC 623 note.

Notwithstanding section 9 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 628), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission may issue such rules and regulations as the Commission may consider necessary or appropriate for carrying out this title, and the amendments made by this title, only after consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Labor.

SEC. 105. EFFECTIVE DATE. 29 USC 623 note.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as otherwise provided in this section, this title and the amendments made by this title shall apply only to—

(1) any employee benefit established or modified on or after the date of enactment of this Act; and

(2) other conduct occurring more than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

(b) COLLECTIVELY BARGAINED AGREEMENTS.—With respect to any employee benefits provided in accordance with a collective bargaining agreement—

(1) that is in effect as of the date of enactment of this Act;

(2) that terminates after such date of enactment;

(3) any provision of which was entered into by a labor organization (as defined by section 6(d)(4) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(d)(4))); and

(4) that contains any provision that would be superseded (in whole or part) by this title and the amendments made by this title, but for the operation of this section,

this title and the amendments made by this title shall not apply until the termination of such collective bargaining agreement or June 1, 1992, whichever occurs first.

(c) STATES AND POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to any employee benefits provided by an employer—

(A) that is a State or political subdivision of a State or any agency or instrumentality of a State or political subdivision of a State; and

(B) that maintained an employee benefit plan at any time between June 23, 1989, and the date of enactment of this Act that would be superseded (in whole or part) by this title and the amendments made by this title but for the operation of this subsection, and which plan may be modified only through a change in applicable State or local law,

this title and the amendments made by this title shall not apply until the date that is 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act.

(2) ELECTION OF DISABILITY COVERAGE FOR EMPLOYEES HIRED PRIOR TO EFFECTIVE DATE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—An employer that maintains a plan described in paragraph (1)(B) may, with regard to disability benefits provided pursuant to such a plan—

(i) following reasonable notice to all employees, implement new disability benefits that satisfy the require-

ments of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (as amended by this title); and

(ii) then offer to each employee covered by a plan described in paragraph (1)(B) the option to elect such new disability benefits in lieu of the existing disability benefits, if—

(I) the offer is made and reasonable notice provided no later than the date that is 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act; and

(II) the employee is given up to 180 days after the offer in which to make the election.

(B) PREVIOUS DISABILITY BENEFITS.—If the employee does not elect to be covered by the new disability benefits, the employer may continue to cover the employee under the previous disability benefits even though such previous benefits do not otherwise satisfy the requirements of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (as amended by this title).

(C) ABROGATION OF RIGHT TO RECEIVE BENEFITS.—An election of coverage under the new disability benefits shall abrogate any right the electing employee may have had to receive existing disability benefits. The employee shall maintain any years of service accumulated for purposes of determining eligibility for the new benefits.

(3) STATE ASSISTANCE.—The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Secretary of Labor, and the Secretary of the Treasury shall, on request, provide to States assistance in identifying and securing independent technical advice to assist in complying with this subsection.

(4) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this subsection:

(A) EMPLOYER AND STATE.—The terms "employer" and "State" shall have the respective meanings provided such terms under subsections (b) and (i) of section 11 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 630).

(B) DISABILITY BENEFITS.—The term 'disability benefits' means any program for employees of a State or political subdivision of a State that provides long-term disability benefits, whether on an insured basis in a separate employee benefit plan or as part of an employee pension benefit plan.

(C) REASONABLE NOTICE.—The term "reasonable notice" means, with respect to notice of new disability benefits described in paragraph (2)(A) that is given to each employee, notice that—

(i) is sufficiently accurate and comprehensive to appraise the employee of the terms and conditions of the disability benefits, including whether the employee is immediately eligible for such benefits; and

(ii) is written in a manner calculated to be understood by the average employee eligible to participate.

(d) DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYEE PENSION BENEFIT PLANS.—Nothing in this title, or the amendments made by this title, shall be construed as limiting the prohibitions against discrimination that are set forth in section 4(j) of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (as redesignated by section 103(2) of this Act).

(e) CONTINUED BENEFIT PAYMENTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, on and after the effective date of this title

and the amendments made by this title (as determined in accordance with subsections (a), (b), and (c)), this title and the amendments made by this title shall not apply to a series of benefit payments made to an individual or the individual's representative that began prior to the effective date and that continue after the effective date pursuant to an arrangement that was in effect on the effective date, except that no substantial modification to such arrangement may be made after the date of enactment of this Act if the intent of the modification is to evade the purposes of this Act.

TITLE II—WAIVER OF RIGHTS OR CLAIMS

SEC. 201. WAIVER OF RIGHTS OR CLAIMS.

Section 7 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 626) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f)(1) An individual may not waive any right or claim under this Act unless the waiver is knowing and voluntary. Except as provided in paragraph (2), a waiver may not be considered knowing and voluntary unless at a minimum—

"(A) the waiver is part of an agreement between the individual and the employer that is written in a manner calculated to be understood by such individual, or by the average individual eligible to participate;

"(B) the waiver specifically refers to rights or claims arising under this Act;

"(C) the individual does not waive rights or claims that may arise after the date the waiver is executed;

"(D) the individual waives rights or claims only in exchange for consideration in addition to anything of value to which the individual already is entitled;

"(E) the individual is advised in writing to consult with an attorney prior to executing the agreement;

"(F)(i) the individual is given a period of at least 21 days within which to consider the agreement; or

"(ii) if a waiver is requested in connection with an exit incentive or other employment termination program offered to a group or class of employees, the individual is given a period of at least 45 days within which to consider the agreement;

"(G) the agreement provides that for a period of at least 7 days following the execution of such agreement, the individual may revoke the agreement, and the agreement shall not become effective or enforceable until the revocation period has expired;

"(H) if a waiver is requested in connection with an exit incentive or other employment termination program offered to a group or class of employees, the employer (at the commencement of the period specified in subparagraph (F)) informs the individual in writing in a manner calculated to be understood by the average individual eligible to participate, as to—

"(i) any class, unit, or group of individuals covered by such program, any eligibility factors for such program, and any time limits applicable to such program; and

"(ii) the job titles and ages of all individuals eligible or selected for the program, and the ages of all individuals in the same job classification or organizational unit who are not eligible or selected for the program.

"(2) A waiver in settlement of a charge filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or an action filed in court by the individual or the individual's representative, alleging age discrimination of a kind prohibited under section 4 or 15 may not be considered knowing and voluntary unless at a minimum—

"(A) subparagraphs (A) through (E) of paragraph (1) have been met; and

"(B) the individual is given a reasonable period of time within which to consider the settlement agreement.

"(3) In any dispute that may arise over whether any of the requirements, conditions, and circumstances set forth in subparagraph (A), (B), (C), (D), (E), (F), (G), or (H) of paragraph (1), or subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (2), have been met, the party asserting the validity of a waiver shall have the burden of proving in a court of competent jurisdiction that a waiver was knowing and voluntary pursuant to paragraph (1) or (2).

"(4) No waiver agreement may affect the Commission's rights and responsibilities to enforce this Act. No waiver may be used to justify interfering with the protected right of an employee to file a charge or participate in an investigation or proceeding conducted by the Commission.".

29 USC 626 note.

SEC. 202. EFFECTIVE DATE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The amendment made by section 201 shall not apply with respect to waivers that occur before the date of enactment of this Act.

(b) RULE ON WAIVERS.—Effective on the date of enactment of this Act, the rule on waivers issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and contained in section 1627.16(c) of title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, shall have no force and effect.

TITLE III—SEVERABILITY

29 USC 621 note.

SEC. 301. SEVERABILITY.

If any provision of this Act, or an amendment made by this Act, or the application of such provision to any person or circumstances is held to be invalid, the remainder of this Act and the amendments made by this Act, and the application of such provision to other persons and circumstances, shall not be affected thereby.

Approved October 16, 1990.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—S. 1511 (H.R. 3200):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 101-664 accompanying H.R. 3200 (Comm. on Education and Labor).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 101-263 (Comm. on Labor and Human Resources).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 136 (1990):

Sept. 17, 18, 24, considered and passed Senate.

Oct. 2, 3, considered and passed House.

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